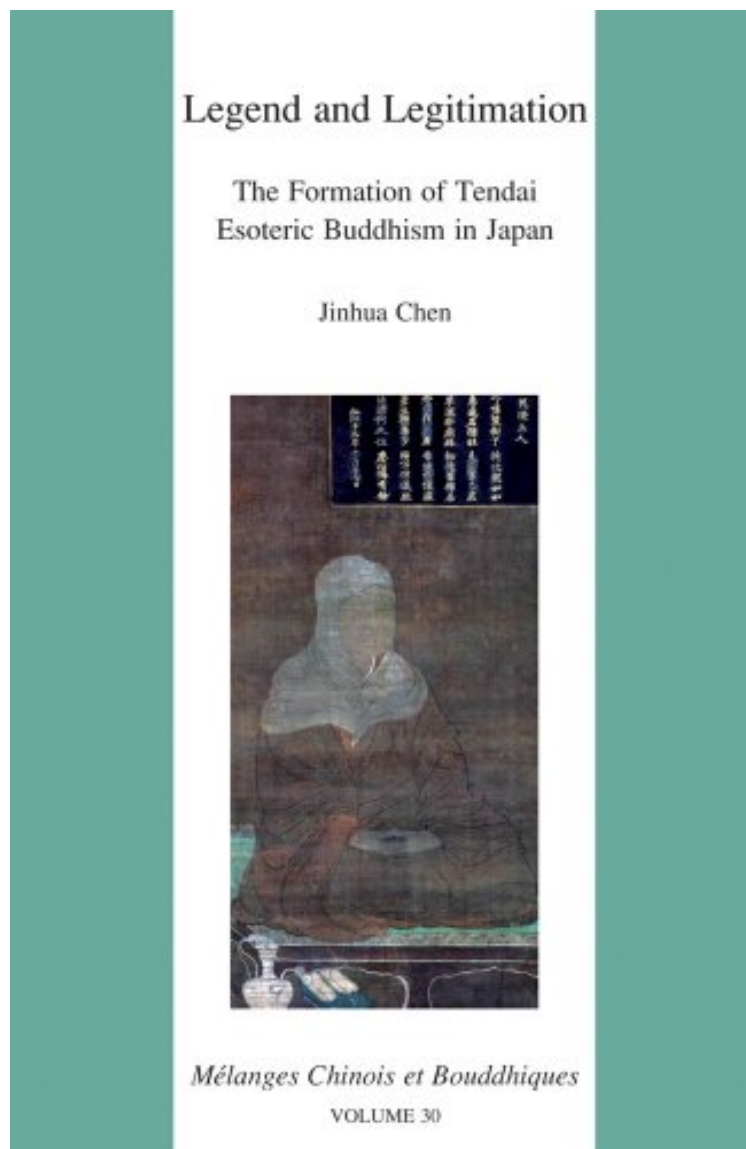


[FREE] Legend and Legitimation: The Formation of Tendai Esoteric Buddhism in Japan (Melanges Chinois et Bouddhiques)

## Legend and Legitimation: The Formation of Tendai Esoteric Buddhism in Japan (Melanges Chinois et Bouddhiques)

J. Chen

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**J. Chen : Legend and Legitimation: The Formation of Tendai Esoteric Buddhism in Japan (Melanges Chinois et Bouddhiques)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Legend and Legitimation: The Formation of Tendai Esoteric Buddhism in Japan (Melanges Chinois et Bouddhiques):

7 of 8 people found the following review helpful. "Impositions, Fables and Forgeries" By Crazy Fox Within most overviews of Japanese Buddhism, Shingon usually gets to be characterized as "the" Esoteric school of Buddhism in that neck of the woods. Despite the Tendai school's long and sustained emphasis on and dedication to this particular form of Buddhism, any expertise they might have gained thereby sort of gets short shrift. Oddly enough, this holds true to some degree even in more specialized academic treatments, and so Jinhua Chen's detailed focus on Tendai Esoteric Buddhism in this fine monograph helps even the odds if just that much. Even so, underlying this study is the uncomfortable fact that Tendai's insecurity vis--vis Shingon is anything but new, and this rivalry may well have inspired some otherwise upstanding Tendai clerics to try their hand at a little pious fraud. According to the Tendai school's own account, the Tendai founder Saicho received duly-certified Esoteric initiations from the eminent Chinese monk Shunxiao, particularly in a complex of doctrines and practices characterized by the correlation of a specific set of dharani with specific levels of siddhi mastery as outlined in three Indian scriptures (or three versions of one scripture, as the case may be). For all of his quiet, understated prose and measured tone, Chen essentially takes this venerable Tendai historiography and flips it topsy-turvy. As he argues, the Siddhi scriptures were cut-and-paste jobs cobbled together in Japan well after the fact to substantiate the likewise utterly forged transmission documents from Shunxiao, who (it turns out) wasn't all that eminent after all, nor was he aware that he was supposed to be. Pretty incriminating stuff, and Chen's highly meticulous textual analysis proceeds with painstaking care--so much so that sometimes the discussion seems to plod along, but considering the task at hand the author is necessarily covering his bases so as to reach a conclusion that is convincingly airtight. The Gordian Knot of countless nagging textual and historical puzzles comes undone with this reversal as well, tellingly enough. Well, at least that's the general upshot of what is an extensive and finely detailed study the likes of which one doesn't see enough of nowadays. Of course, potential readers should keep in mind that this is a specialized work that assumes prior familiarity with the overall subject as well as patient willingness to work one's way through what at first blush may deceptively appear to be nitpicky observations. Contributing to the scholarly quality of the book is the commendable yet uncommon practice of following all quoted passages with the Classical Chinese original. Indeed, in a textual analysis of this nature, it's often helpful to be able to see the original text for oneself. Complete translations of the three forged Siddhi scriptures in this same format can also be found as appendixes, a real plus. Anyone deeply and seriously interested in the history of the changing fortunes of the Tendai and Shingon schools and their interaction should find this carefully yet radically erudite study well worth their effort. But perhaps also a bit disturbing. I have to say, I found the sordid spectacle of people otherwise supposedly dedicated to seeking the highest spiritual truths instead involving themselves in the mendacious fabrication of religious lineages from whole cloth and the deliberate forgery of holy texts troubling, though the author is too kind to emphasize this point overmuch. Herein lies a puzzle in human contradiction larger than the expert analysis that uncovered it in the first place, perhaps.

During his nine-month stay in China, the Japanese monk Saicho (767-822) was alleged to have been initiated into an illustrious esoteric lineage starting from a prestigious Indian Esoteric patriarch. It is also believed that Saicho's Chinese mentor, based on three esoteric texts translated by the Indian Patriarch, transmitted to him some particular forms of esoteric teachings, the core of which is preserved in one of the two "dharma-transmission documents" from Saicho's teacher. This is the conventional view regarding the roots of Tendai Esoteric Buddhism in Japan. This book subjects this conventional view to a critical examination. It argues that the two "dharma-transmission documents" were not written by Saicho's Chinese mentor, but were prepared in Japan for strengthening the legitimacy of the initiation Saicho received from China. The three siddhi texts attributed to the Indian patriarch were also composed in Japan as the scriptural support for Saicho's esoteric transmission. The Tendai form of Esotericism in the name of Saicho was for the main part created not by Saicho himself but by his followers. These negative conclusions can be turned into a positive agenda for future research of Japanese Tendai Buddhism. Scholars can turn from a fruitless search for the roots of Tendai Esotericism in China to look more closely in Japan. This study may invite more scholarly attention to a host of Buddhist apocrypha which, long regarded as Chinese, were actually produced in Japan or Korea. This book also addresses issues of larger implications for East Asian religions, including the manufacturing process of the so-called Buddhist apocrypha and their roles, lineage construction for the purpose of religious legitimation and of overcoming borderland complexes, application of overarching theoretic patterns in different religious traditions.